

BV
4020
D728
1979

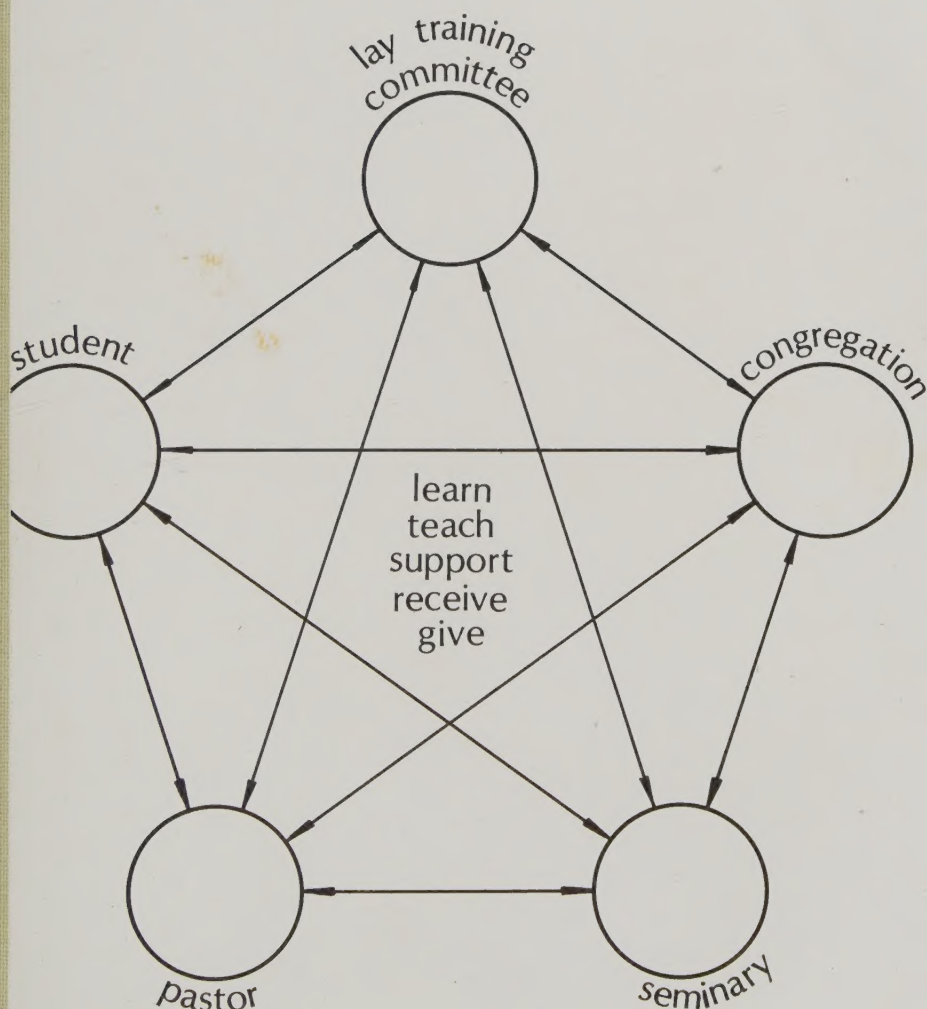


The Library
of the
School of Theology
at Claremont

1325 North College Avenue
Claremont, CA 91711

the Lay Training Committee: what's in it for you?

ricia G. Drake



20
28
79



The Lay Training Committee: what's in it for you?

Patricia G. Drake

The Alban Institute gratefully acknowledges a grant from Trinity Church, New York City, which helped make reprinting this publication possible. Copyright 1979, reprinted 1984, The Alban Institute, Inc. All rights reserved. This material may not be photocopied or reproduced in any way without written permission.

INTRODUCTION

Two and a half years ago, a group of lay people, backed by the Alban Institute and supported by a grant from the Lilly Endowment, set out to explore the involvement of laity in theological education through lay training committees. A lay training committee or intern committee is a group of lay people who are selected from within a congregation to work with a seminary student during his or her field education or internship experience in that local church.

In the past, ordained professionals have been totally responsible for theological education. However, during the past decade a small but growing number of seminaries have adopted the concept of the lay training committee to provide an added dimension to the education of the seminarian. This new model recognizes that lay people have important contributions to make in the preparation of the seminarian to become the ordained minister within a congregation.

The lay training committee research team wanted to find out what happened when lay people became involved in theological education in this new way. The team was also interested in learning what effect, if any, the experience of serving on a lay training committee had on a participant's commitment to theological education and to the support of seminaries. During this period, the research team held in-depth interviews with members of eighteen lay training committees (affiliated with four seminaries) as well as their students and pastors. These eighteen congregations, representing several denominations, varied in size, with memberships from 100 to 9,000. Some were located in large metropolitan areas, while locations of others ranged from New England suburbs to small, isolated towns in the hill country of Texas.

The purpose of this booklet is to share with you the kinds of things that are happening within those lay training committees. It is addressed to those of you who wish to know more

about the sharing and growing that can happen as a result of bringing lay people and future clergy together in this way. (You will be aware of the many implications in these findings for the relationship of laity to their present clergy, too.)

Perhaps you are a member of a lay training committee yourself. You might possibly be a student who is interested in knowing more about what can go on within these groups. You may be a member of a congregation who is curious about what these committees do. Or perhaps you are a member of the faculty or board of directors of a seminary that is contemplating adding lay committees to its field education program.

For those lay people and students who are involved in a lay training committee at this time, the purpose of this booklet is not to replace the material furnished by the Department of Field Education of your seminary but to supplement it. It is not a recipe for "a successful lay training committee." In the eighteen committees we interviewed we found no two alike. Each was a product of its unique congregation and community. The character of the seminary and the denomination of the church influenced the workings of the group. The maturity and personality of the student as well as the attitudes and skills of the lay people had an effect on the way the group operated.

Primarily, we hope that sharing what we have found to be happening in other groups will encourage you to think about the potential for mutual growth in your training site. You may already have done a lot of thinking about this, and you may have insights of your own that you can pass on to us and to your seminary. We'd like to hear from you.

We feel that we have only begun to uncover the potential of lay involvement in theological education. We see this study as a point of departure -- a launching pad for all of us.

THE LAY TRAINING COMMITTEE: What's in it for you?

Often lay people are clearly confused about what the seminary expects to have happen when a lay training committee is included in the field education experience of seminary students. We sometimes get the feeling that "everybody understands what we are supposed to be doing here but me."

Each seminary will probably have different goals and objectives for its program. For some, the primary objective may be to help the student understand the specific tasks involved in the worship services of the local church or how to perform baptisms, funerals and weddings. Others may wish students to understand the administrative chores ministers have to learn to do -- such as balancing the budget. Perhaps learning to preach and teach more effectively is of primary importance. Still others may have hopes that the student will have the opportunity to clarify his or her thinking about what it means to "minister" or have expectations that students may learn skills for improving the quality of relationships in congregational life. The overriding goal may be for the student to be exposed to the beliefs, values and philosophies of lay people, to see how those viewpoints are revealed in all our lives and to see how all of that relates to our biblical and historical tradition.

Therefore, the first question of importance to lay people in understanding their role in a field education site is "Why is the program in existence?" What pieces of theological education does the seminary expect to be carried out in the congregation? Why does the seminary wish to add the dimension of the lay training committee to the student's experience in a parish? You might begin by trying to establish, with the help of the seminary or its written material, the seminary's "reason for being" for field education with lay training committees. You may find it neces-

sary to look realistically at the time you have to spend with the student and establish some priorities.

The second important question is "Who is expected to learn?" In our research, it soon became evident that although the primary educational effort is usually directed toward the student, the quality of the learning experience for the student is directly related to the expectation and willingness to learn and grow of all the parties related to field education: the student, each member of the lay training committee, the congregation, the pastor and even the seminary itself. The experience seemed most rewarding when all these parties thought of themselves both as teachers and learners. They are also in a position to support each other in the learning experience -- each with gifts to give and needs to be fulfilled. The diagram on the cover of this booklet was one way the research team expressed this discovery about the systemic character of field education.

While committee members were aware that the experience had been exciting and worthwhile for them personally, often they began with no expectation of getting anything out of the experience for themselves other than the satisfaction of having "helped a student in his or her learning." The committees that worked well often stumbled upon the discovery that mutual expectation for growth and learning for each of them stimulated the process in a way that would not have happened had the committee been focused only on the student's learning. One clergy supervisor who was also a member of the lay training committee said:

"The experience that we had set for ourselves for the evening was for each of us to talk about what we felt our 'gifts and gaps' to be in our own ministry. As the pastor of this congregation, I felt that really hard to do. The student must have had those same misgivings. But to know that everybody was going to get up there and do the

same thing really helped. It was an exciting time and we all learned a lot about ourselves." Sometimes those same types of experiences helped lay people and students alike come to grips with what their ministry is. A student recounted this experience:

"When I went into the church for my field education assignment I had some pretty definite ideas about what I expected to be doing in that parish and was all ready to dive right in. It didn't quite work out that way. This church has a very active group of lay people and I found that I had to get in line to do some of the things that I thought would be 'my ministry' in that congregation. Lay people were already doing those things very well. I had a tremendous identity crisis. The team worked hard with me on those issues and we spent two years trying to work on what my role was as rare as the task of the church was concerned and what the role of the lay person in the congregation was. It was quite a learning for all of us. It really turned my head around about ministry."

If, then, all these people can expect to learn and grow, the third question might be "What can be learned?" What kinds of benefits can each of these parties gain from being a part of this experience? The following are concrete examples of what can be learned, illustrated by comments taken from the interviews with the eighteen lay training committees:

THE STUDENT IS LEARNING:

1. The student can get an opportunity for a close look at congregational life as an ordained minister to help him/her make a rational decision as to whether this is the correct direction for his/her life.

"It was our experience in the church and it still is in a way that we have had a lot of people graduate from seminary but too high a percentage of these people who are out in the pastoral

ministry for five years or so find that this is not really what they wanted to do."

2. The student can get a realistic look at the pressures and strain that are a part of the ordained ministry and get some experience in dealing with them.

"I think that being placed in a congregation meant that it enlarged your responsibilities. To keep up an academic load to live up to the accreditation part of your work plus this fuller dimension of congregational involvement made it quite a load. It is a lot, but I don't think it was inappropriate. The numbers of things do get pretty overwhelming."

3. Experience can be gained in a type of parish that is new to the student.

"A comment our student made showed some real gain in maturity. He said: 'One of the questions that I have always had about being in the Methodist system is that if I get up there and the bishop decides to send me out to the rural areas, I don't think I could really cope with that. After coming here, now, I can go before the bishop and say that I will take any appointment he wants to give me. I have seen the rural side and I have lived the urban life and so now I feel I can work and minister in either area. As far as the educational impact of that, it is phenomenal because many seminary students do have a real problem in a conference like ours where we have three metropolitan areas and all the rest of it is rural.'"

4. The student can gain actual experience in interviewing for a job.

"We had several students who interviewed and of course part of the philosophy is that this is to be as close as possible to the experience of candidating for a church, so there were four students or so. We had a special calling committee as we would on the church board."

5. The evaluations can be helpful in surfacing areas that need work for the student.

"We were forced to reflect on areas and be specific about some things that maybe we kicked around in a fleeting moment, regarding the program or the student."

6. The evaluation can point disparities in the way different parties view the student and encourage discussion about them.

"If the intern committee is over here on a scale of one to ten and the field instructor is over there and the student evaluates himself on one side or the other, then you have something to discuss. We did that and most often it started us asking questions."

7. From the lay training committee a student can get a sense of the history of the congregation and an understanding of the community in which he/she is to minister. The student can learn how to go about understanding the community in later placements.

"It is a very old church and I have known it for many years. From my father, I hear about his father's experiences in the ministry here, and from my mother, my great-grandfather's experience in the ministry here. It has become an inner city church. The needs are very great and our church is trying to meet these needs."

8. The lay training committee can be a direct model of a pastor-parish relations committee.*

"It seems that the intern should be able to see that the committee is not just part of theological education but that the relationship with the LTC could be the same as the relationship he has with the pastor-parish relations committee. When he moves into a local church this would be a kind of learning process for his own congregation."

*This term refers to a mandated committee in every Methodist congregation. Congregations of other denominations sometimes have similarly functioning committees which are usually activated only when there is "trouble." The lay training committee is a model of how such committees could be used productively in healthy situations.

THE SEMINARY CAN BENEFIT AND LEARN

1. The committee can be a vital link between the seminary and the local church.

"I believe the more we can become involved directly, the more understanding we will have of one another because there is not a lot of communication between seminaries and congregations per se, so I think that this is a means for contact between the seminary and the local church."

2. Congregations with lay training committees can provide both volunteer services and financial support for seminaries.

"I look at this student and I see all the education he has probably already gotten and how much more he needs and will probably get, and I say, 'Wow, that is going to be expensive.' I see that there is money needed for this kind of thing. We expect to have people who are educated, to be knowledgeable and that costs money. We need to be aware that they need our help whether it is a dollar or ten or a hundred, whatever it is. Every little bit helps. Kind of like putting your money where your mouth is. There is nothing like being involved."

3. The internship or apprenticeship period can give a sense of professionalism to the ministry.

"In my own personal experience across 30 years, I have seen a lot of people who felt that the ministry was not worthy of their children. They want their sons to be attorneys or medical doctors. I have come to an awareness that this program here is one that could give a sense of dignity and/or importance to the ministry. Certainly it brings the point home that it can't be totally compared to other professions. It is going to give a seriousness to it in a professional sense. It is going to make people see that the church is not looking for the poor young man or woman who barely scrapes through and who can't make it at anything else so he decided to be a preacher. It is helping them to see that the church needs the finest and brightest minds there are."

THERE ARE MANY BENEFITS FOR THE CONGREGATION:

1. The congregation can gain a better understanding of itself and its community through the eyes of the student.

"I tell you, when somebody like that (the student) from the outside comes in and gives us his or her viewpoint, it's really a help. He worked with different groups within the church and gave us some good insight. We are only moderately large yet we have a lot of varying beliefs within the church. Sometimes we really don't acknowledge that and when someone comes in and analyzes our church and tells us about it, even though that person hasn't been around a long time, it's helpful."

2. The seminary student can sometimes provide a contact with what is going on outside the congregation and community.

"I think it is a fact that people here consider it an honor to be asked to serve on this committee. One thing that was touched on earlier is that we are kind of isolated here and when we get someone who is sharp coming in from the outside it gives us a view of the outside world again, so to speak. I think that is another reason a lot of us want to serve on the committee. It gives us a peek at what is going on outside."

3. The congregation can be strengthened by the depth of the relationships that are the result of the lay training committee's work.

"I would like to say that we all have made a very strong point about having known each other but so often we really didn't. I feel like we don't know each other as intimately as we should. In working on a committee like this I get to know someone in depth that I only knew from the outside previously. I think here again it strengthens the congregation tremendously. I understand it now because we have had in-depth conversations. Before, it was more superficial."

4. The presence of students can enrich the life of the congregation.

"Students have really enriched the ministry life a great deal. Their fresh insights about scriptures which they got in their studies, and just their enthusiastic approach to the pastoral ministry and what they were about were good. We miss them when they're not around."

5. In the process of helping the student learn, members of the congregation can learn more about themselves and their tasks.

"We took her in with the Witness Commission and let her be the leader in setting goals and targets. In each of those she had a member of the Stewardship Committee working with her on those goals and it was interesting to see how she was able to get that committee member involved in what she was doing. She was helping to get research in and reporting on what was going on. She just seemed to draw the commission out. It was good for her and it was good for the commission."

6. The congregation can learn a new way of relating to the pastor.

"What it has meant for me is deepening spiritual growth which we share with each other and the professional we've hired. Certainly, if the minister is learning, each one of us is learning, too. When we walk out we are all strengthened by the process."

THE PASTOR CAN LEARN AND BENEFIT:

1. Having a student can give the clergyperson the advantage of a different personality looking at the congregation.

"It is exciting to work with an intern because, for me, it is ten years since seminary, and just by being a different personality, the intern can teach me a tremendous amount. And then there are the two of us with our different talents looking at the congregation. With this student this was really true because we were

both very new. I had come in June and he came in August. I told him when he came here, 'Well, we are in the same boat, trying to figure out what is going on. Anything you can tell me as you make your visits or any insights you have about the community or where our ministry should be is the kind of information I need.' I felt a real comradeship having someone else that I could come to and say, 'Hey, this has happened in the congregation. How do you interpret this?' There were several areas where I felt very pressed and that I could not get into. He handled it completely and, in turn, gave me a tremendous insight into what was going on in there and in the whole congregation. To me personally he gave in-depth understanding of some personalities, groups and programs that I wouldn't have had even by now, after a year."

2. Having a student operating with a lay committee can give the clergyperson the opportunity to observe someone else in the role he/she generally fills. (This happens essentially when the pastor is a member of the committee.)

"I got to see our student working within a pastor-parish type of committee structure. On the lay training committee, I was just another member and could sit back and observe him, and the next day in our meeting we could discuss what he was doing, how he was coming across, what he was saying. It was very helpful to him and to me to watch someone else function and see how he interpreted his role. It is something I don't get to do very often."

3. A pastor can learn to use a lay support group in looking at his/her ministry and life and discover resources to get some support.

"I set up what we call a pastoral care and concern committee and two of the people on the lay training committee are on that. We meet about every month and talk about my work and about my goals which haven't become congregational goals -- my dreams. They evaluate some of my sermons -- they have done two this year -- but

it is a continuing evaluation process which I think found its roots in the lay training committee experience and the fact that the training site team was important to me."

4. When the pastor is a member of the lay training committee it can be an opportunity to deal directly with the issue of role and authority in committees.

Q "You went as one of the group and tried to step out of your clerical role as much as possible? I am not sure you were able to do that. You must have a strong group."

A "We did have a strong group. I probably really wasn't able to step out of my role but I was able to do it more than in any of the other groups I meet with here. As a matter of fact, the agenda item for my next meeting with my pastoral care committee is to deal with my role and my authority in committees. I don't know how we are going to cope with that, partly because of the traditional concepts and views of the ministry but also because I have been here a long time. The longer I am here the more people are inclined to wait to hear what I am going to say or where I come down on things. But we try to be conscious of that, and there was a lot of talking about it by different people at lay training committee meetings and training site team meetings."

THE LEARNINGS FOR LAY TRAINING COMMITTEE MEMBERS CAN BE MANY:

1. The committee can be an opportunity to learn to deal more honestly and openly with one another about what members are feeling. Lay people can learn to be more reflective about themselves as well as the student.

"My observation is that as a training committee, perhaps like no other group in the church, we learned to be honest with each other and to be open about what we were feeling. We learned what it was like to do some evaluation of our-

selves as well as the student and we really built a lot of feelings of unity."

2. Lay people can learn group skills that can carry over into other areas of their lives.

"I picked up several things that I have continued to use through the years. Everybody got in on building the agenda -- you allot your time and then you stick to it. That's something I can sharpen up and continue to use."

3. The lay training committee can intentionally promote the personal growth of individual members.

"We were supposed to take an area that we would want to grow in. Some area that has some conflict that we have recognized since we had been in the program and working with the student."

4. The committee provides opportunity and support for reflecting on one's own life and ministry.

"It was one of the few times that I had ever had to think about what I expected or wanted from my pastor. I had to do that to be able to give feedback to a person in training. I think that in our heritage you can't really expect things of your pastor that are all that much different from what you would expect of yourself. You have to struggle with your own concept of discipleship when you talk about what it means to be a pastor, what kinds of approaches to relationships and what kinds of personal qualities you want to affirm, what kinds of skills you want that student to know. You can't help but reflect on your own needs at the same time. If you are a part of a support group for somebody who is in a growing situation, if you identify with that situation at all, you can't help but work out your own autobiography in that context."

5. The committee can give members an opportunity to achieve a quality of relationship with a group from the congregation that is rare in committee work.

"Being relatively new in the congregation, I appreciated getting this chance to know the

other people on the committee. I don't know how long it would have taken me to feel this comfortable with the ones that I worked with on the team. But I feel like they are my oldest friends in the city from having gone through those meetings."

6. Committee members can gain some experience in successful conflict management that can be used in other areas of their lives.

"I remember one of the senior, most experienced professionals in our church who sat on the Facilities Commission telling me that he had learned things from the student regarding conflict management that he took back to his work and practiced with his staff. This man is about to retire, but he was learning from the seminary student and practicing it back on the job. I was thrilled when I heard that."

7. Committee members, as well as students, can learn the art of negotiating for one's needs.

"There was another time when a work contract came to the committee for a third year and there was a conflict about it. A number of us wanted him to work on some job in the church and he didn't really want to do that, but he wasn't very clear about it at the beginning. Finally through the meeting this all came out. He was encouraged to say what it was he really wanted to do in contrast to this other thing that he thought we wanted him to do, and it became clearer. The relationships were good because we were able to talk about it. It wasn't a cover up -- a kind of false good relation. We were very honest. At some points we had to struggle to get things into the open and we grappled with it and I think that made the good relationship."

8. The committee can give support in facing and expressing one's own personal doubts.

"I think that we felt that our role was to help him become... that he had the makings... and maybe there would be some things that people would let him know when they weren't satisfied. But that was all part of the role. He had times

of doubt, and he shared those with us and at this Ecclesiastical Council one of the ministers said, 'You're coming on very strong and you're true and committed now. What do you do with your doubts?' And the student stood up there and said, 'Well, you know, just about ten days ago I was standing in the shower and it came to me, 'I wonder if I really do believe in God.' And then he just stood there and kind of talked it out. And you know you almost just let your jaw drop that he was saying this to the Ecclesiastical Council with that kind of candor and that kind of soul searching, that he came out with that -- facing doubts that you have. That's very powerful and very winning in our kind of church."

9. It is helpful for lay persons to share their theology and to have to verbalize it.

"In dealing with her sermons, that was the time when she dealt with us most theologically because she really did talk to us about her theological and faith issues. She took a scripture and in turn we questioned her: 'Do you really believe that? What are you trying to say?' and those were the times that the committee worked with her the hardest. They were long sessions and we dealt with her about what she was trying to say about the Christian faith. After that period then we were probably more inclined to deal with her on a total basis because she opened herself up personally in the beginning -- her strengths and her weaknesses -- and then she talked about things that were going on in the church. When she gave her sermons, which were kind of in the middle of her time with us, we really dealt with her about her theological beliefs and that put most of the pieces together. As we got to the end we were able to share some of our theology with her.

These are only samples of the payoffs, benefits and learnings that can happen when people, whether they are on committees, in seminaries

as students or faculty, in congregations as laity or ordained clergy, commit themselves to learning, teaching, supporting, giving and receiving together. What we heard most clearly was that these people need to talk together -- to share, in a reflective way, their points of view about ministry, about the church, about field education and the task assigned to them. Field educators do not know if the things described above are happening. They need our help to know what kinds of things do happen within our groups and what hinders growth and what helps it to happen. Field educators and seminaries need to listen. Lay people need to hear more about the biblical and historical traditions of their faith. We lay people need to share what those traditions say to our own lives today, and seminaries and clergy need to listen.

What we heard from all these different groups of people was that each of us has a piece of the puzzle for making the Christian message relevant in our lives. No one group has all the answers or, alone, can even define the questions.

The lay training committee is one way in which we can begin to understand our need to talk to each other and to begin to learn how to enter into that conversation.

The Research Team

Patricia Drake, Project Manager

Ronald Hanft (member of lay training committee,
Washington City Church of the Brethren)

Velmar Hendrix (member of Needville Presbyterian
Church)

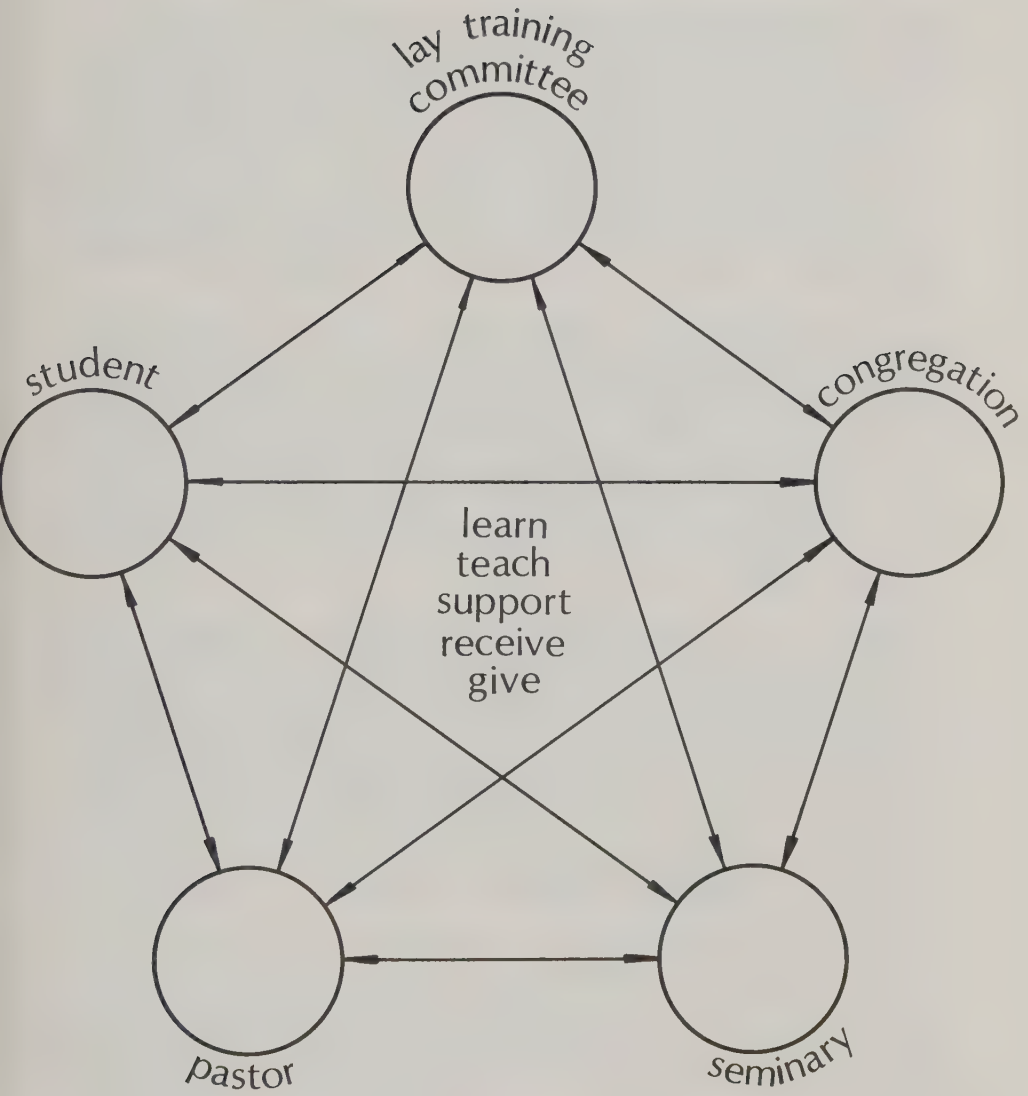
David Kemnitzer (member of lay training committee,
St. Mark's Episcopal Church)

Elizabeth Mathiasen (convener of lay training
committee, St. Francis Episcopal Church)

Russell Murphy (member of lay training committee,
Immanuel Church on the Green)

Ruth Shinn (member of lay training committee,
First Congregational Church)

Elizabeth Wilson (member of St. Albans Church)



You may also be interested in these
Alban Institute publications

Lay Leaders' Resource Notebook, edited by Celia Allison Hahn. Drawing together the best articles from Action Information, this 184-page notebook addresses the needs of board officers and members, chairs of committees and parish organizations, clergy, staff and church librarians who guide and resource lay leaders. It is designed to fit into a three-ring binder so users can add to it from specially keyed future issues of Action Information and other sources. (AL80) \$20.00, Binder \$2.95.

Building Stronger Lay Committees, edited by Patricia G. Drake. This handbook is the ideal tool for lay committees and all church groups--boards, committees, study groups, etc. Chapters include discussions of: developing small groups, how to give helpful feedback, covenant building, spiritual formation, theological reflection, and writing case studies for education and training purposes. (AL67) \$4.00.

Connections: Concepts and Methods for Lay Committees in Field Education, by Patricia G. Drake. The second of two publications on Lay Training Committees, this manual challenges every part of the traditional field educational program. Full of clear concepts and practical realistic advice, the manual encourages lay committees to take the risk of doing a strong and honest job that enhances the growth, not only of the student, but also of the lay committee members themselves. (AL66) \$30.00.

The Authority of the Laity, by Verna J. Dozier, with Celia A. Hahn. Verna Dozier travels around the country preaching, teaching the Bible, and encouraging laity to own the ministry to which they were commissioned in their baptism. Read her views on how the people of God have given up their authority; how religion has become a fragment of our common life rather than its bond; how tragically we misuse the Bible, transforming its proclamation of God's love into a collection of rules. (AL63) \$5.25, Study Guide (AL63SG) \$1.75.

\$1.40 handling charge on each order. Orders under \$25 must be prepaid. No postage charged on prepaid orders.

The Alban Institute:
An Invitation to Membership

The Alban Institute, begun in 1974, believes that the congregation is essential to the task of equipping the people of God to minister in the church and the world. A multi-denominational membership organization, the Institute provides on-site training, educational programs, consulting, research, and publishing for hundreds of churches across the country.

The Alban Institute invites you to be a member of this partnership of laity, clergy and executives--a partnership that brings together people who are raising important questions about congregational life and people who are trying new solutions, making new discoveries, finding new ways of getting clear about the task of ministry. The Institute exists to provide you with the kinds of information and resources you need to support your ministries.

Write us for more information about how to join The Alban Institute, particularly about Congregational Memberships, in which 10 designated persons (25 for Supporting Congregational Members) receive all benefits of membership.

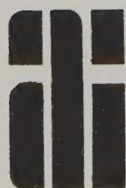
The Alban Institute, Inc.
Mount St. Alban
Washington, DC 20016

443479
THEOLOGY LIBRARY
CLAREMONT, CALIF

AL42



Patricia G. Drake



The Alban Institute, Inc.
Mount St. Alban
Washington, DC 20016

BV
4020
.D728
1979

Drake, Patricia G.

The lay training committee : what
in it for you? / Patricia G. Drake.
Washington, D.C. : Alban Institute ;
1979 (1984 printing).
16 p. : ill. ; 23 cm.

443479 1. Theology--Study and teaching.
Clergy, Training of. 3. Laity. I.
Title

